

Rethinking Emergency Management

From Hurricanes and Floods to Pandemics and Bioterrorism: How Can We Get the Most Out of Private-Public Partnerships?

By **ANTHONY D. BEGANDO**

Last year, the U.S. experienced 37 major catastrophic events – the highest number in more than a decade – emphasizing the importance of a strong, integrated public-private response to disasters.

The post-Hurricane Katrina environment spurred numerous activities seeking to create or strengthen bonds between public and private sector emergency management groups. Efforts have focused on resolving critical gaps in state or metropolitan public sector response capabilities to large-scale bioterrorism attacks, pandemic disease management and catastrophic natural disasters. While substantial and tangible progress has been made, public and private sector leaders need to examine the outcomes and lessons learned and continue to evolve and expand collaborative efforts.

Moreover, as initiatives continue to grow, establishing a framework to share, refine and scale capabilities is the logical next step in the evolution of public-private emergency management.

Strengthening Bonds Between Public and Private Sectors

Recognizing a true shift in the thinking of emergency management officials, I started working to develop large-scale public-private emergency response capabilities in 2005. Historically, our government and private organizations independently defined and implemented disaster recovery plans to restore communities to a functional state. We have come to the realization, however, that neither the public nor private sector can resolve these problems alone. Leaders are no longer determining if developing solutions with the private sector makes sense, but are focusing on how to rapidly develop and deploy solutions across geographies.

Over the last five years, we have worked with several states and metropolitan areas to form public-private solutions to some of the most complex and vexing scenarios facing emergency management and public health agencies.

As our work evolved, we developed and implemented the busi-

ness operations center (BOC) concept to facilitate private sector communication and information sharing capabilities within existing state and metropolitan emergency operations centers.

Early Private Sector Collaboration Programs

Many early private sector integration programs developed in hurricane-prone areas and after 9/11 focused on sourcing supplies and common operational capabilities with which government organizations struggled in emergencies. This included allocation of large-scale trucking operations, hauling and debris removal services, large-volume purchasing of supplies/commodities, and the transportation and sheltering of displaced persons.

As private sector organizations willingly and successfully supported these initiatives, both sides began to establish a level of collegial trust that fostered the development of more formal partnerships focused on solutions to rapidly restore the socioeconomic continuity of an affected community. Public sector officials started to realize that private sector organizations could leverage their operational capabilities to provide entire support functions for response and recovery efforts. In many states and metropolitan areas, the public and private sectors have expanded relationships to include advance planning, collaborating on training activities, security, intelligence, critical infrastructure protection, and large-scale exercises.

Georgia Advances Private Sector Involvement

Beginning in 2004, the Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) pioneered several programs to establish the private sector as an integral partner in emergency response and recovery programs. These efforts have been largely supported through a longstanding partnership with the southeast regional chapter of Business Executives for National Security (BENS Southeast).

Spurred by a successful public-private partnership developed to support the 2004 Group of Eight (G8) conference held at Sea Island, Georgia, the state sought to expand the relationships and goodwill resulting from that effort in to other areas of emergency management. Several programs were launched to examine where private sector integration could substantially improve readiness and response capabilities for the state.

This included the successful execution of a large-scale, public-private bio-terrorism response drill performed across five metropolitan Atlanta counties. The drill utilized hundreds of private sector employees to conduct an effective pharmaceutical mass-dispensing operation that delivered would-be antibiotics to more than 1,300 residents at multiple distribution points. The exercise demonstrated that by incorporating “just-in-time” training, private organizations could provide volunteers to greatly enhance an overall community response to a bio-terrorism emergency like an anthrax attack.

As a result of this work, additional efforts were undertaken to promote sharing of protected information and intelligence support. Collaborative efforts also addressed the problem of providing adequate liability protection for private organizations supporting emergency response operations. Last year, Georgia became the third state to pass a “good Samaritan law” that protects private businesses that provide aid during disasters.

Program Design Incorporates Private Sector Input

In an effort to examine how effective public-private collaborations could prevent the systemic failures that plagued initial response and recovery efforts in Louisiana following Hurricane Katrina, GEMA facilitated a roundtable conference attended by regional government and business leaders.

A key outcome of this conference was recognizing the need to establish a formal, consolidated means of communicating with the private sector. Private sector firms outlined their inability to directly engage the emergency management process and their frustration in fielding and vetting overlapping requests from numerous public agencies and organizations involved in the emergency management process.

The session provided opportunities for exploring how effective collaboration and communication could greatly enhance community-level response and restoration efforts. For example, several national retailers were quick to point out that their store parking lots were routinely used by public agencies as distribution points for ice, water, food, and other critical commodities. If public officials could provide generators or limited power restoration, security, and telecommunication support, those locations could also provide pharmaceuticals, building supplies, tools, clothing, fuel, and cash to area residents. These organizations could leverage their existing global supply and inventory management functions to provide for the specific needs of each community. Such a collaborative response could restore critical services to affected communities more rapidly.

Framework Needed to Facilitate Collaboration and Communication

Conference discussions confirmed the need to integrate the private sector into Georgia's emergency management activities and establish a consolidated means of communication and operational coordination. Volunteers partnered with the Georgia Tech Research Institute to develop a formal strategy and operational model for this capability. Our work led to the formation of the BOC concept and efforts to formally implement a permanent facility for public/private collaboration within Georgia's State Emergency Operations Center.

Since its implementation in 2006, the Georgia Business Operations Center has been activated to support response efforts for every major hurricane affecting the Southeast, several tornados and local-level natural disasters. It has also assisted with strategic planning sessions and large-scale exercises. The experience and capabilities resulting from this effort has stemmed the development of several BOC operations with large metropolitan and state emergency operations centers.

How a Business Operations Center Works

Housed within a state or metropolitan emergency operation center, a business operations center provides the forum and infrastructure for public-private collaboration, coordination and decision-making. The BOC performs the following functions:

- ◆ Leverages private sector support from the onset of an emergency and creates a single point of contact between the public and private sectors within the existing emergency management infrastructure
- ◆ Facilitates communication, information sharing and problem solving
- ◆ Provides processes and technology for submission, consolidation and fulfillment of resource requests
- ◆ Manages public-private relationships and recruits new private sector partners
- ◆ Coordinates public-private training and exercise activities

Incorporating Business Operations Centers in Public Emergency Centers


The following cases illustrate how business operations centers can enhance public emergency centers' operations.

Los Angeles

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health recently completed a 15-month pilot program focused on integrating private sector support in their bioterrorism response plans. The county's geography and population density presented public health officials with many challenges in developing effective distribution mechanisms for transporting and dispensing large quantities of medical countermeasures to more than 10 million residents.


In working with the Homeland Security Advisory Council (HSAC), the county has developed and initially exercised a county-wide medication distribution and re-supply function leveraging existing supply chain management functions of a large industrial materials supplier.

A BOC has been implemented in the county emergency operations center to facilitate private sector interaction. Not only has



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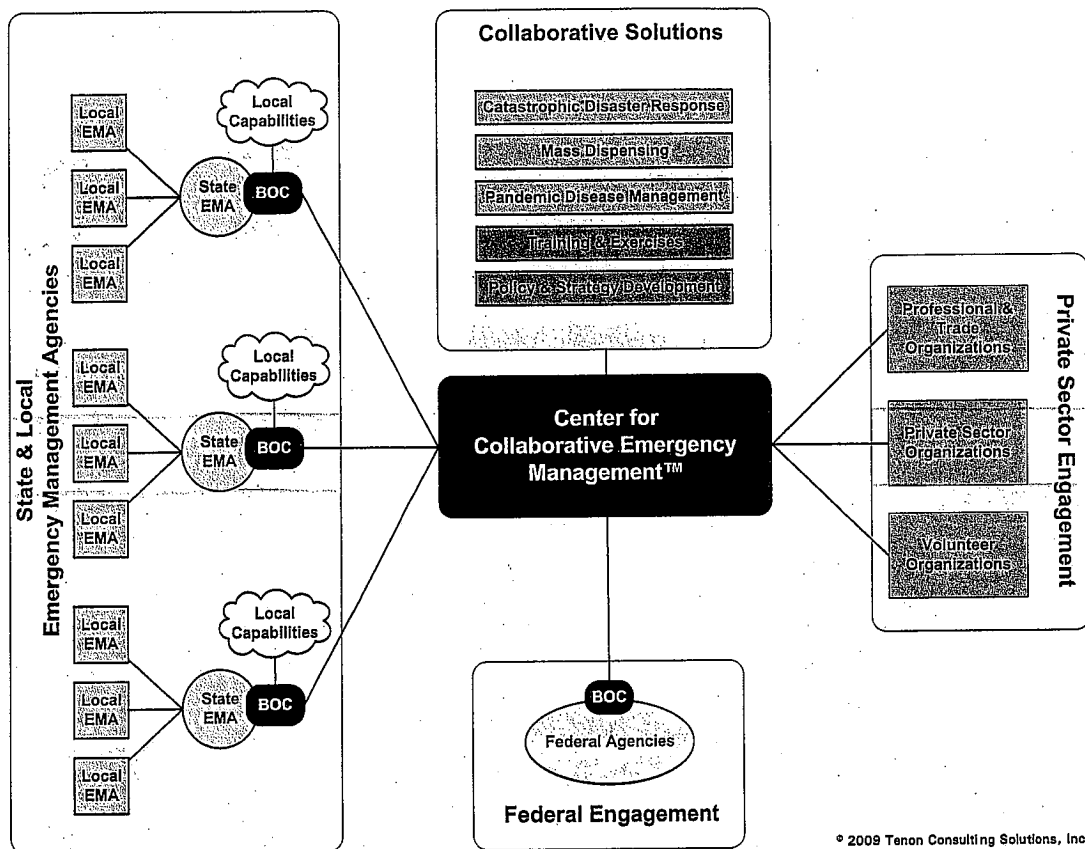
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the BOC proven useful in facilitating private sector coordination in planning and exercise activities, but was also used to integrate private sector resources to address several major wildfires affecting the region last year. This included the evacuation of Catalina Island residents threatened by a fast-moving fire.

Baltimore and St. Louis

Similar efforts are underway in Maryland and Missouri. Through a collaborative effort involving six counties, the City of Baltimore and the Greater Baltimore Committee, a comprehensive plan to implement a regional public-private bio-terrorism response program was completed last fall.

St. Louis County also recently completed a major planning effort and exercise that incorporated private sector collaboration on response strategies for pandemic influenza. In both cases, emergency managers are implementing a BOC to serve as the hub for facilitating programs and providing the structure for future collaborative efforts to address numerous catastrophic scenarios.

Critical Next Step: A Common Platform Across Jurisdictional Boundaries

As these types of efforts continue to develop nationally, the need for a formal framework to coordinate and facilitate growth of public-private emergency management efforts across geographies is critical.

CCEM: Collaboration Across Geographies

In response to this need, the Center for Collaborative Emergency Management (CCEM) was formed as a private non-

profit organization to serve as the basis for facilitating ongoing program development. The concept for a non-profit, public benefit corporation emerged as a direct result of our work to advance the business operations center concept to support regional and multi-state events. Moreover, feedback from more than 100 large corporations, trade unions, industry associations, and chambers of commerce confirmed a clear desire by those organizations to work with emergency managers using a common platform across political and jurisdictional boundaries.

CCEM is the first model that identifies how to provide a collaborative public-private disaster planning and response

solution that is scalable from local jurisdictions to the national level as needed. This model integrates the private sector into the response to all hazard catastrophes for all jurisdictions.

CCEM will provide a common platform of services, programs and technical support to the network of business operations centers currently being developed throughout the country. It will also offer BOCs a set of simple tools to facilitate, consolidate and distribute requests for all forms of assistance between emergency management agencies and private sector organizations.

When you consider that the private sector owns 80 percent of the nation's infrastructure and equipment, providing the means for real-time collaboration between the public and private sectors enables government to access far-reaching regional and national infrastructure following a catastrophic emergency.

Although evacuation methodologies and information exchange have greatly improved, emergency response and disaster recovery efforts continue to be hindered by the lack of an integrated, comprehensive mechanism to coordinate and distribute resources across public agencies and private organizations. To support our communities when large-scale catastrophes or acts of terrorism strike, we need to take the logical next step to implement a comprehensive, national emergency management solution that expands the role of the private sector as a highly valuable, trusted partner.



Anthony D. Begando is founder and CEO of Atlanta-based Tenon Consulting Solutions, which provides management and operations consulting services to commercial, health care and public-sector organizations. The company has pioneered collaborative public/private solutions to respond to terrorism, pandemic diseases, natural disasters, and other large-scale catastrophes.